



## The Qualitative Report

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Volume 25 | Number 2

How To Article 6

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2-9-2020

### Qualitative Studies and Textual Document Research in the United States: Conducting Research in National Archives

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#### Recommended APA Citation

Ulrich, T. A. (2020). Qualitative Studies and Textual Document Research in the United States: Conducting Research in National Archives. *The Qualitative Report*, 25(2), 359-378. Retrieved from <https://nsuworks.nova.edu/tqr/vol25/iss2/6>

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## Qualitative Studies and Textual Document Research in the United States: Conducting Research in National Archives

### Abstract

Qualitative research typically involves gathering evidence through surveys, interviews, and observations. At some point, qualitative researchers may consider including primary source textual documents in their studies. Depending on the study focus, textual document collection may require a visit to a United States national archive. Although preliminary investigations may provide a sense of what to expect during archival research, there is no resource that details the navigation of the U.S. national archive experience. This article will supply the reader with background knowledge related to decisions in choosing textual documents as study evidence, navigating a national archive, and employing the strategy of document sampling. The resulting description is designed to prepare researchers for a successful archival research experience.

### Keywords

Qualitative Inquiry Evidence, Textual Documents, Archival Research, National Archives, Document Authenticity and Credibility, Official Government Documents

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### Acknowledgements

I would like to express gratitude to Dr. Jessica Heybach for her guidance and James Ulrich for his patience and support during the research and writing process.

## On What Autoethnography Did in a Study on Student Voice Pedagogies: A Mapping of Returns

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*In this paper, I invite you into some considerations of what autoethnography might do in research, what it might teach us as researchers. In doing so, I return to an autoethnographic study I engaged in a few years ago which was contoured through the question: How do teachers experience student voice pedagogies? In that study, I experienced autoethnography as a creative methodology that allowed me to go back to two experiences I had with youth, or student voice projects. The paper embodies a return to the autoethnographic study of my doctoral research, which itself was a return to the previously experienced student voice projects; a return that is being propelled by my new position as a professor, supervising students in the mappings of their research landscapes. Returning, thus, becomes a central motif that invites dwelling in the simultaneity of pastpresentfuture – wherein the present is the folding in of the past and the future through attuning to embodied ways of knowing, sensing, being, and doing -- disrupting colonial epistemological legacies of progress and linearity found in conventional and taken-for-granted research practices. I ask, what does it mean to go back, in efforts oriented towards a future (such as social justice)? What might it mean to conceptualize time differently within our research, teaching, and learning? I argue that autoethnography, when engaged through an active nomadism, opens space for learning about our research practices, ourselves as researchers and pedagogues, as well as deeper understandings of our research topics. Keywords: Autoethnography, Student Voice Pedagogies, Social Justice*

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In this paper, I invite you into some considerations of what autoethnography might do in research. In doing so, I return to an autoethnographic study I engaged in a few years ago which was contoured through the question: How do teachers experience student voice pedagogies? In that study, I experienced autoethnography as a creative methodology that allowed me to go back to two experiences, I had with student voice projects; student voice being one articulation of the broader field of youth voice. I recognize that at this point the multi-planarity of this introduction might make things complicated, but it is precisely the complexities and contradictions in the web of research that I believe autoethnography encourages one to dwell in. While I believe that these complexities come to shape a newly formed research-assemblage (Fox & Alldred, 2015) for sense-making, at the outset, let me distinguish the three planes through which I nomadically shuffle in the paper: (1.) This paper: What role did autoethnography play in the sense-making? How did autoethnography shape my learnings, how was it pedagogical in the study?; (2.) The autoethnographic study itself (what was it and how did it unfold?); and (3.) The two youth voice projects I participated in and returned to through the autoethnographic study. Overall, then, I am interested in: What possible / imagined / desired voicings are elicited, or made available, to youth in pedagogical encounters (research included therein)? How do we come to interpret youth voice and what was the role of autoethnography in this process? The autoethnographic study itself was enacted during my doctoral program, and now, as a professor challenged with supporting doctoral students in their own research, many of whom express an interest in the possibilities of

autoethnography, I take this act of writing through the three planes as a way to cultivate my supervision and pedagogy in students' work.

So, the paper becomes a return to a return; I return to the autoethnographic study that allowed me to return to previous experiences. In so doing, I want to play with and trouble the imperial logics of progress and linearity of time in research which I will get into later. What does it mean to go back, again and again, in efforts focused towards a future (my overarching research agenda is grounded in such a future oriented practice, that of social justice)? What might it mean to conceptualize time differently within our research, teaching and learning? I want to reposition time such that we come to recognize how the present is the simultaneous folding in of the past and the future.

Unfortunately, language becomes a technology of articulation, "Our language misses the ineffable and the slippery" (Gallagher, 2015, p. xiv). The act of writing this paper lives in the tensions between my desire to make the simultaneity of thought—rather than a causal link from one idea to the next—to make the complexities and flows, representable and comprehensible to others through the two-dimensional page. This quandary is not mine alone, as Kathleen Gallagher (2015) aptly notes in her introduction to a text on embodiment in research, "One of the challenges faced by many others of these chapters is the effort to render three-dimensional, sensory experiences onto the two-dimensional page" (p. xiv) – and, effort it is! Necessarily so, Gallagher (2015) does not provide a step-by-step method for resolving this conflict as the provocation rests on amplifying the way language is typically put to work to create sense and coherency out of incommensurability. In other words, Gallagher (2015) names and marks a tension that resonates with my attempts to communicate my three-dimensional wonderings and nomadic wanderings to others through the platform of a journal article, and she does so without offering a way out of the tension. My approach in finding an organizational framework to animate the unfoldings and learnings was to map the three planes into three parts in this paper: (1.) Brief contexts of the broader study, or the how; (2.) Research ruminations on the cultural politics of research in which I situate the "why" of doing nomadic inquiry; and (3.) So what? What *did* autoethnography do in the sense making?

### Part One: Context of the Study

My interest in the broader autoethnographic study was to better understand the sociocultural, historical, and material configurations that shaped the contours of possibility for voice. I became interested in a particular articulation of youth voice as taken up in school--variously named student voice or pupil voice--in part because of the discourses that positioned it as filled with transformative possibilities (see, for example, Cook-Sather, 2007; Fielding, 2004; Giroux, 1986; Lincoln, 1995; Mitra, 2001). Student voice is presented in the governing literature as transformative for the youth themselves as well as transformative for teachers and the system of schooling at large. With a background teaching high school English Language Arts in an "urban" school, so named because the students identified as African American, Caribbean, and Latinx, I was all the more drawn to the potential of student voice as a disruptive technology. You see, there are numerous studies that animate how schools populated by racially and economically marginalized communities take up a rather didactic approach to curriculum and pedagogy focused on skills development, behavior management (discipline), and deficit orientations (see, for example, Jean Anyon's [1997] work as well as Patrick Finn [1999], Allan Luke [2010], Robyn Maynard [2018], and Lisa Delpit [1995]). Indeed, we are inundated with popular media that continues to draw from historical narratives around the limited intelligence, the dangerous, violent and overly sexualized racialized community which is not to be trusted. Through benevolent, and seemingly innocent narratives that *we* (White, "civilized," upper-middle class women, myself included therein) just need to teach *them* how

to be more human, excuse me, more literate, more academic, then there might just be hope. Within this context, what voices, identities, histories, and possible futures are ultimately silenced and why should we care? The last part of the question draws us closer to an active social justice, where in the *affects*<sup>1</sup> of unlearning habits of being (McDermott, 2014 might propel us to cultivate generous and generative organic relations, not only with other humans, but with the more-than-human worlds inclusive of discourses, ideas, narratives, and space as agentic beings.

So, needless to say, I was very interested, and indeed hopeful, when I got an invitation to be an external evaluator of a student voice project in a Newark, NJ middle school where grades six to eight students participated in professional learning on curriculum design and effective pedagogy with their teachers. Shortly after this project, I partnered with a community center in Montreal and hosted a summer internship on research framed as youth participatory action research. Neither of these two projects “delivered” on what I had hoped and dreamed for youth voice as transformative. Instead, I was left with a Lacanian-Foucauldian lack, a desire unfulfilled (see, Tuck, 2010) and perhaps unfulfillable within the configurations of the work. I found myself frustrated by what felt like the ongoing reproduction of the status quo, of the discourses, structures, and ways of being that reified the silencing I had naively hoped voice work would disrupt. I admit that I was seeking a silver bullet, that I was pulled right back into the dominant codified desires for “transformation” that rest on the belief that we can change one thing and expect the structures of feeling (Williams, 1977) knotted into every fiber of the institution of schooling to suddenly shift! After some time, I could not shake my frustrations and couldn’t leave the work alone. I was haunted, as much by the sentiments of “failure” based on my expectations for the projects, as well as having to face the implications of the expectations I placed on student voice. Indeed, it wouldn’t leave me alone; while each of the projects had officially ended, I wanted to spend more time with them.

### **Autoethnography as Nomadic Inquiry: Returning in Spacetime Through Embodied Memories**

Autoethnography offered a way back in, it allowed for a nomadic return (see, for example, Braidotti, 1994; Deleuze & Guattari, 1980/1987; St. Pierre, 1997), and I designed a study that sanctioned dwelling in the felt frustrations through a focus on personal experiences with / in / through / against broader cultural contexts of teaching, working, and researching with youth. By way of critical engagement with memory and content analysis of materials created during the projects, I read and returned through embodied spacetime to the student voice projects (for a discussion of some of the key literature that informed my approach to autoethnography, see, Chang, 2008; Ellis, 2004; Ellis, Adams, and Bochner, 2011). Methodologically, if you will, I started with sensation, plugging into data circuits through surges of feelings that mapped me within simultaneity of pastpresentfuture (for alternative ways of engaging sense-making within research, see, for example, MacLure, 2013; St. Pierre, 2013; St. Pierre and Jackson, 2014). Memory work in this project, as I call the culling of memories through sensory attentiveness to constitute “data,” was an embodied enactment that challenged linear temporality. Importantly, memory was repositioned in the body, “memory and re-membering are not mind-based capacities but marked historicities ingrained in the body’s becoming” (Barad, 2007, p. 393).

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<sup>1</sup> I engage the language of “affects” here to suggest the emotional and embodied effects of unlearning how we come to know and be in the world.

The act of centering my body, my felt experiences and affects, the past was no longer past, but was indeed also always already present and future. Gatens and Lloyd (1999) who animate Spinozist thinking-being-doing in research and world-making suggest,

An affect whose cause we imagine to be with us in the present is more intense than if we do not imagine it to be with us [...] The images of future or past things, considered in themselves without reference to their causes, affect us just as much as if we are imagining something as present. For all are, as images, present modifications of our bodies and hence of our minds which are the “ideas” of those bodies. (p. 52)

Thus, centering affect and the body in the sense-making sensibilities within the autoethnography brought the past sensations and future desires into an intensified relation in the present. The feelings that I had that the student voice projects “didn’t deliver” were with regards to the hopes for a social justice future (I sensed that little was transformed, and rather we continued to walk the path already laid for us through reproduction and recognizability in the broader discourses that work to marginalize the youth with whom I worked), and yet they were in my body in the present. I believe that the work of this present contemplative moment (plane one in this paper), wherein I consider what autoethnography does, or allows for in the research-assemblage, in part, amplifies the importance of reconsidering linear time that is embedded within conventional approaches to the procedural unfoldings of research. Additionally, autoethnography invites a reconsideration of future-oriented practices grounded in social justice; again, we are called away from causal links to progress (we are always “getting better; that the past was worse than where we are now”). Yet the question becomes “how emancipatory goals of progressive social trans/formation and justice can be envisaged, let alone obtained, if we can no longer ground our theories and political practices in enlightened narratives of humanist progress and liberation” (Rossini & Toggweiler, *Posthuman Times*). We must, then, encounter research, itself, as a concept and practice, as a simultaneity of pastpresentfuture, and this is where I turn my attention to in the next section.

## **Part Two: Ruminations on the Cultural Politics of Research**

While I believe in the possibilities of research, I think it’s important to recognize that research comes with stories, histories, relationships, beliefs and practices that shape the possibilities and limitations of the work: legacies that play a significant role in the ongoing oppression and silencing of particular voices in our schools, communities, and global webs of relation. Indeed, when we listen to the words of Linda Tuhiwai Smith (1999), Sylvia Wynter (2003), Franz Fanon, (1967), Cynthia Dillard (2012), Leigh Patel (2015), and the list could go on, we are called upon not only to recognize the colonality of research – the role research played and continues to play in “rationalizing” and circling back on itself to legitimize the categorization of difference through logics of hierarchy, supremacy, and dehumanization – but to do research differently. So, yes, my research, and all research is political, even if there are no guarantees. During the autoethnographic study, while sitting in the tensions of doing critical research “for” social justice and recognizing the troubled histories with which I perpetuated in the act of doing research, I wrote the following ruminations:

*Research.*

*A concept that is (over)populated with others' intentions. Research. A violent, colonial, dehumanizing project. Research. Disembodied. Euro-Enlightenment undertaking.*

*Research...re-search.*

*Searching for a way out. Research. Emancipatory. Participatory. Provocative. Transformative. Power-ful, empowering. Ethical embodied encounters. Entanglements. Possibility.*

*Research.*

In these ruminations, I try to capture the historical and ongoing imperial flows in research, even as possibilities (such as autoethnography and other nomadic inquiries, e.g., St. Pierre's [2014] post-qualitative research) continually form and reform. Research, in some ways, has become overly codified, what comes to be recognizably research requires us to take up the very technologies of power that reconstitute Euro-Western colonial onto-epistemologies. Western governing regimes continue to create the contours of research that is permitted to claim that label: what gets included and excluded as "legitimate" research? How do we know? What disciplinary structures are in place that allow for the continuation of relatively singular understandings of knowledge and research? What I am saying, drawing on Linda Tuhiwai Smith's work in particular, is that Western research brings with it a particular set of values and conceptualizations of time, space, subjectivity, agency, power relations, and knowledge. Western research is encoded with imperial and colonial discourses that influence the gaze of the research, where and how the researcher turns towards and encounters her research as worldmaking. How might we reposition difference within desiring machines such that difference is generative rather than deficit, lack, or combative. I want to suggest that autoethnography opened a particular space to think about thinking, a "metadiscursive mode [that...] marks the [...] intellectual's responsibility for and toward the act of thinking" (Braidotti, 2011, p. 134) to work with-through-against these onto-epistemological legacies and propensities entwined within the project of Research.

Linda Tuhiwai Smith (1999), among others (e.g., Patel, 2015; Tuck & Yang, 2014), urges us to decolonize the research process, to think-be-do differently with research, particularly research on and with communities who have been ruined by research and / as colonialism (see also Tuck, 2009). Now, in her work, Smith (1999) speaks of the necessity for Indigenous communities to research back against the imperial logics, as a way of voicing those made to be voiceless in the colonial legacies of research, much like Spivak (1987) offered when she asked "Can the subaltern speak?". Taking her call from my position as a white woman implicated, in many ways which I cannot tend to in this paper (for more discussion, see McDermott, 2015, in press), in the ongoing colonial relations, I took up autoethnography as one possible tool to expose and challenge the inheritances imbued in the research machine.

Autoethnography's place in the broader story of research is precarious. It promises to re-embody the research processes, destabilizing oppressive onto-epistemological regimes of social science inquiry by refusing a distanced, disembodied, non-relational researcher position

(de Freitas & Patton, 2009; Ellis, 2004; Ellis, Adams, & Bochner, 2011). As an alternative methodology awakening creative imaginings, I work with autoethnography as embodying a process ontology (Braidotti, 2011; Lemke, 2000), in that it is a method that requires us to continually work with the creative and effortful openings *as well as* the pressures pulling us back into a hermetically sealed research paradigm. What work do we (feel we have to) do to make autoethnography an “acceptable” and recognizable research approach (see, for example, Anderson, 2006; Chang, 2008; Ellis, 2006). What I am getting at is that autoethnography can be, and I want it to be, positioned as a method of researching back to the Euro-Enlightenment positivist tracings of its “identity,” and yet it is those positivist maps that come to configure if autoethnography, indeed, *is* research. As autoethnography invites us to entangle the self as an embodied entity in the research process, we are offered *potentia* in bearing wit(h)ness (see, Fine, 2007) to the ways canonical research practices shape our social relationships. *Potentia*, importantly, is taken up here to signal the circulatory, the capillary nature of power that Foucault (1982, see also Braidotti, 2011) animates for us. *Potentia* is power that is affirmative and generative rather than simply restrictive (*potestas*).

### Part Three: A Future Return to Voice--Autoethnography's Pedagogy

Voice is now accepted, at times uncritically, as crucial to and for youth public and democratic participation (see, for example, James, 2007). Globally, we witness youth leading the charge in issues such as gun laws (for example, the students taking action against gun laws after the Parkland school shooting) and Black Lives Matter. How do we (re)orient ourselves to youth voices, articulations, the (un)spoken and performed? What does it mean to engage the teacher, researcher, and writer practices that mediate and constitute knowledge produced about and through youth voice? In other words, what are the tensions in seeking youth voice for / as social justice by centering the teacher-research-writer experiences through autoethnography? Perhaps there is a contradiction here, then again, perhaps it is the very tension that holds the assemblage together. Autoethnography, as a nomadic inquiry, opened the space for me to map the vulnerabilities, contradictions, and tensions always already present in (the) research; it allowed me to un-mask and critically engage the taken-for-granted ways research is conducted. Here are some of the things I am able to articulate at this time about the learnings autoethnography offered in the study.

One of the things I opined in the initial research was the fact that autoethnography, through its temporal scheme grounded in memory work of past events, did not offer change possibilities to be enacted in the spacetime of the student voice projects. The timing was such that I could not physically return to engage future possibilities for the work with the same youth. This troubled me, and in writing up the “limitations” of the research (once again being pulled back to a recognizable articulation of “research”) I amplified this troubling timing. How can this work be(come) transformative, how can it enact change and push us toward social justice futures if the sense-making took place years after the events themselves? While Custer (2014) works through his stories of pedophilia, trauma, and abuse, rather than youth voice, pedagogy, and social justice as my work concentrated on, his ponderings on autoethnography are worth repeating at length here:

Autoethnography can radically alter an individual's perception of the past, inform their present, and reshape their future if they are aware and open to the transformative effects. Much of the process of autoethnography revolves around the idea of time and space. Time, as a linear procession of past, present, and future increments of experience, undergoes a metamorphosis. It becomes a dance without boundaries. Space includes all of the elements that an individual



utilizes to construct their identity. Those elements can be corporeal objects (e.g., their body, a house, a loved one, etc.) or non-corporeal manifestations (e.g. beliefs, personality traits, ideas, etc.). (p. 2)

I now sense a different relationship with change-oriented efforts (e.g., the focus in social justice work towards a better *future*) in a *pastpresentfuture*. I have been physiologically changed by dwelling in affects that invite me into a *pastpresentfuture* through the research. (Remember the quote from Gatens and Lloyd which amplifies how affects have the potential to change the intensities felt in our bodies, bringing the past and the future into closer proximity to the now.) I carry these changes with me and they get plugged into various teaching-researching-writing machines I become entangled with. When and where change and implications for and from research emerge cannot be known in advance, as we cannot know what a body can do prior to its encounter and entanglement with other bodies—including bodies of knowledge (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987; Massumi, 1987, 1995). Research and Euro-enlightenment narratives now articulated through neoliberal logics press(ure) us to keep moving onward, forwards, towards progress and modernity through linearity (e.g., Smith, 1999). All the while, conventional research is given permission to dehistoricize itself, permission to forget and thereby disacknowledge its own legacies. Instead, I want to put autoethnography to work in repositioning research possibilities in the *pastpresentfuture*, to embody memory as one site of decolonizing research, to learn to remember what it has learned to forget (see, for example, Dillard, 2011).

In the time since I experienced this autoethnography on student voice pedagogies, I have encountered many other ideas, people, spaces, and, indeed, temporalities as I moved to another city, began an academic position, collaborated on various projects, and re-aligned myself to the flows of time shaping professorship at this place and time. I have been moved with / in / through / and, yes, sometimes against these assemblages in ways that shaped the contours of thinking about the autoethnographic study enacted for my doctoral studies. Within these relations, I have different responsibilities; I am no longer “convincing” committee members and the University at large that autoethnography is a recognizable research project, that my work, and yes, my body *belongs* in the academy. Instead, now I am charged with supporting students in thinking-being-doing with uncertainty, a particular surge that ignited much of my passion for autoethnography when a dear friend and colleague introduced it to me. The students I encounter want guaranteed results, findings that will lead somewhere with certainty, and I want them to seek discomfort and unlearning.

Andrea Smith (2013) reminds us of the need to be present in the moment within anti-oppression work (which, of course also means opening ourselves up to the *pastpresentfuture* simultaneity) in the following quote: “There is no simple anti-oppression formula” (or, in my articulation above, no silver bullet), “we are in a constant state of trial and error and radical experimentation” (para. 2). Indeed, there are no research formulas either (e.g., Law, 2004; MacLure, 2013; Manning, 2015; St. Pierre, 2014). We must work to release ourselves of neoliberal time pressures (to get the degree completed so as to not incur extra fees and prove that we are grantable through “reasonable” time to completion in our various programs). What I am getting at in some ways undoes the “point” of this paper, to articulate what autoethnography did in a study on youth voice, how it became pedagogical. I will momentarily get to some of those wo/anderings. In the process of writing as a method of inquiry (Richardson, 2000), I find I need to honor the time that has passed since doing the study, which is inevitably shaping the contours of my present sense making and future desires.

## On the Many Returns

In this last section, then, I return to the concept of the return, recentring autoethnography as a nomadic inquiry. Admittedly, I have travelled quite a bit, and I am hopeful that I have travelled in a good way wherein I am not just taking things for myself along the route, but am giving back. Perhaps some of the giving back is in the tact and tone wherein my hope was to invite others to think about their relationship with research and knowledge production; maybe the writing is a way for me to give the “responses” to students that seem to lurk in the middle space, through the circulating affects that connect and move us but go unarticulated. I know, almost 10 years (and with thousands of miles separating us) after the student voice experiences that sparked these lines of flight (both in pursuing the autoethnography and returning to it again in my musings here), that the likelihood of directly enacting a change to / for / with those youth and their lives, is quite remote. Yet, there are others who might desire transformative possibilities when eliciting youth voices, particularly historically marginalized youth. To them, to the youth themselves, and, indeed, to the youth who charged me (as in energized) to doing / being / knowing in more complex and ethical ways, I offer my thoughts on what I learned in doing an autoethnography.

### A Pedagogy of Autoethnography.

- **Pedagogical thoughtfulness:** Autoethnography made available a space for pedagogical thoughtfulness (van Manen, 1997). Within the contemporary conditions of global connectedness, where we are faced with increasingly present and intensified presence of others through surges in technology and social media. In teaching and learning, whether in kindergarten to grade 12 or post-secondary, it feels as though there are always “new” and “better” approaches to try (in some cases, these are mandated). Autoethnography invites returning and dwelling, specifically with the unknown (in the sense of the felt or the fleeting), the discomfiting, and uncertainty (there are no guarantees).
- **Interrupting habits of being/Relationships to research:** Relatedly, through a pedagogical thoughtfulness, autoethnography allows us to name and mark the practices in our teaching and research that we repeat without question. Autoethnography invites one to critically question what gets repeated in research and what the implications of that repetition might be. As an alternative methodology it uncovers the workings of conventional research by doing – being – knowing research otherwise. I want to reclaim pedagogy away from technicist, best practice, and strategy-oriented discussions. Instead, I want to (re)orient pedagogy as a dynamic of desired and imagined teacher subjectivity, embodied histories, the pull of institutional imperatives (e.g., official curriculums, schedules, time, behavior), teacher – student relationships, and personal orientations to teaching and learning.
- **Knowledge production, memory, and listening:** Autoethnography allowed for a deeper / embodied listening to and with youth voices, as listening that allowed for “being open to being affected [...] being open to difference [...] not being bound by what you already know” (Davies, 2014, p. 1). I had experienced the student voice projects; I “already knew” what happened. Autoethnography attuned me to the sensations calling me back to the projects, refusing to let me keep pressing on, asking me to dwell in the simultaneity of pastpresentfuture, through memory (re)work in the present, all the while hopeful for a socially just future. Gramsci (1971) says, “the starting point of critical elaboration is the consciousness of what one really is, and is “knowing thyself” as a product of the historical processes to date which has deposited

in you an infinity of traces without leaving an inventory” (p. 324). What are the ways in which articulating through quotidian classroom moments (even, or especially through memory) that shape and are shaped by difference, might allow us to surface the historical traces of the “cryptic inventory” (Gramsci, 1971)?

- **Unearthing complexities:** Returning to the autoethnography, as a nomadic inquiry, animated how autoethnography itself was a tool to uncover the complexities, contradictions, and incommensurable spaces within youth voice work, and research and teaching relations more generally.

## Mapping Returns

I began this paper with the idea of querying what does autoethnography do in a research study interested in pedagogies of eliciting youth voices. My purpose was to map a story of research on youth voice to animate the possibilities for doing critical reflection in our teaching and research practices by enacting pedagogical thoughtfulness in our methodologies. As I nomadically travelled through the multiplanarity that unfolded in my returns, I sensed there were no easily articulatable “answers,” that there is no neat causality between the research design and the learnings many years later. The work I present in the section just prior to this one sits in generative tension with the desire to be recognized and recognizable in my research as well as the very impossibility of doing so. I live, this work lives, within an institution that demands of us particular articulations of “findings” and “so whats.” These hauntings pushed me to map autoethnography with relational conditions of possibility as a critical research approach that questions dominant narratives of research, voice, and education. In the writing of this paper, by allowing myself to return to the autoethnographic return and thus the youth voice projects, I practiced a cartographic sensibility of nomadic inquiry. Much like Braidotti (2011), “I think that many of the things I write are cartographies, that is to say, maps of positioning: a sort of intellectual landscape gardening that gives me a horizon, a frame of reference within which I can take my bearings, move about, and set up my own theoretical tent” (p. 46). One of the hardest things for me to do in coming into the professoriate, has been to locate myself, in the language of the neoliberal university, to “brand” myself. In fact, while in the purgatory of doctoral completion, sessional work, and a postdoctoral position while attempting to secure a tenure-track position, I heard in different ways that my work was too interdisciplinary, it was hard to locate it within the officially sanctioned classificatory identities already present in the university. I felt as though I could fit into so many of the job descriptions, and simultaneously, none of them really resonated with who I want(ed) to be as an academic. This writing, this nomadic mapping of the past 10 years has given me a horizon, one wherein I more comfortably refuse to name and locate myself, instead I build my theoretical tent through concepts that drive my sense-making: affect, embodiment, desire, and social justice. Whatever the contours of the space I find myself, these concepts become my navigational tools always allowing me to come back, to return.

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### **Article Citation**

McDermott, M. (2020). On what autoethnography did in a study on student voice pedagogies: A mapping of returns. *The Qualitative Report*, 25(2), 347-358.  
<https://nsuworks.nova.edu/tqr/vol25/iss2/5>

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